

VZCZCXRO8771
OO RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHWR #1053/01 2531622
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 091622Z SEP 08
FM AMEMBASSY WARSAW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6987
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 WARSAW 001053

SIPDIS

STATE FOR MORRIS, PIERANGELO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/07/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [BO](#) [PL](#)
SUBJECT: BELARUS/POLAND - FM SIKORSKI TO ANNOUNCE
INCENTIVES FOR "BETTER" ELECTIONS

Classified By: DCM QUANRUD FOR REASONS 1.4 (B), (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: MFA officials told AmEmbassy Minsk Charge Moore that Belarusian authorities are "terrified" about the implications that Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia has for Belarus. FM Sikorski reportedly sees recent developments in Belarus, including the release of political prisoners and improved treatment of Polish minorities, as positive signals that Lukashenka might be ready to bargain with the EU in order to counterbalance the Kremlin's growing shadow. Sikorski plans to meet his Belarusian counterpart in a border town in Belarus o/a September 12, and to announce that the EU might consider lifting the visa ban or reducing visa fees depending on the outcome of this month's parliamentary elections. GOP officials were pleased with the discussion on Belarus at the September 5-6 Gymnich meeting and are working to beef up GAERC conclusions on Belarus. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) AmEmbassy Minsk Charge Jonathan Moore and AmEmbassy Warsaw Poloff met September 8 with MFA Director for Eastern Policy Jaroslaw Bratkiewicz and his deputy, Mariusz Maszkiewicz, to exchange views on recent developments in Belarus, EU and U.S. sanctions, and the upcoming Belarusian parliamentary elections. Moore described the current state of play with respect to the release of political prisoners and the Belarusian MFA's positive reaction to the U.S. decision to suspend temporarily sanctions on two Belarusian firms.

TIME TO SET ASIDE "SCHOLASTIC DEBATE"

¶3. (C) Bratkiewicz said Russia's invasion of Georgia and its subsequent recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia had left post-Soviet countries, including Belarus, "terrified" about the prospect of once again becoming full-fledged client states of the Kremlin. He agreed that the fact that Belarus has not recognized the breakaway republics speaks volumes, insisting that now is the time to set aside the "scholastic debate" in NATO and the EU between dialogue and isolation. Instead, it is essential to bolster the EU's relationship with Belarus, as well as Ukraine and Georgia.

LUKASHENKA BENT ON MAINTAINING INDEPENDENCE

¶4. (C) Bratkiewicz said Poland has seen positive signs that Lukashenka is ready to trigger a round of bargaining with the EU, primarily to counterbalance "the Kremlin's growing shadow, which has the potential to eclipse Belarusian independence." Maintaining Belarusian independence rests at the center of Lukashenka's endeavors, notwithstanding his frequent "gestures" to Russia. While Lukashenka may be a dictator, he is still the only viable guarantor of Belarusian independence. The opposition is simply not ready to mobilize society. Western outreach will be the key to underpinning Belarus' sense of independence. Russia's influence on Belarus is a reality, but Lukashenka seems tacitly inclined to push Belarus closer to the West as a counterbalance.

SIKORSKI PLANS TO SEND CLEAR SIGNAL BEFORE ELECTIONS

15. (C) Bratkiewicz said the GOP is "wavering" on the prospects for this month's parliamentary elections. While there is no doubt that the elections will not be democratic, the GOP is hopeful that there will be "elements of rapprochement" in the outcome. It is important to give clear-cut signals in the coming weeks that if Belarus fulfills its obligations and the elections are "better than before" -- both in terms of process and results -- the EU may/may be willing to relax some sanctions, e.g. selectively lifting the visa ban or reducing visa fees. Although "we would be playing a tainted game," Bratkiewicz noted, there do not seem to be other feasible means to draw Belarus closer. Bratkiewicz said FM Sikorski plans to meet with GOB FM Martynov o/a September 12 (in advance of the GAERC) in a Belarusian border town to broadcast his intentions to support relaxed sanctions as a reward for improvements in the electoral process. Bratkiewicz also speculated that Ukrainian President Yushchenko could be another effective channel for encouraging Lukashenka.

16. (C) Bratkiewicz noted that some EU Member States are more prone to "courageous steps" than others and lamented the lack of interest under the Portuguese Presidency. The French similarly have not been engaged and do not seem to have any new ideas. Bratkiewicz expressed disappointment with the first draft of GAERC conclusions on Belarus and offered assurances that the GOP would work to strengthen the text. Bratkiewicz expressed optimism based on "good signals" from discussion at the September 5-6 Gymnich meeting.

WARSAW 00001053 002 OF 002

17. (C) COMMENT. Even before the Georgia crisis, the Poles were looking to ease sanctions on Belarus and hold bilateral meetings above the expert level. Warsaw has expressed somewhat conflicting reasons for the shift, arguing previously that Belarus was too interested in military cooperation with Russia and currently that Belarus is desperate to avoid the bear's embrace. In remarks to reporters, Radoslaw Sikorski complained about the lack of MFA engagement on Belarus when he became Foreign Minister, and pointed to the importance of protecting the Polish minority and advancing Poland's economic interests in Belarus. However complex their reasoning, the GoP has consistently emphasized the significance of Belarusian interest in improving relations with Poland, even though Poland applied the most stringent bilateral sanctions in Europe and led the campaign for EU sanctions. END COMMENT.

18. (U) Charge Moore did not clear this message.
ASHE